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ABSTRACT

Graduate students face a myriad of tasks as they prepare to enter the academic job market. Tips on how to complete a successful job search--from advice about preparing application materials and finding available positions to knowledge about what to expect during the interview--are provided in this paper. It opens with a discussion of applicant personality and how departments are looking for individuals who will "fit" into their departmental culture. The application process is then described, with the admonition that candidates be aware of their wants and needs. Tips for preparing the curriculum vita are offered, including suggestions on format, content, and emphasis, followed by a discussion of where the jobs are. Once potential job sites are located, the applicant must gather materials, such as official transcripts, letters of recommendation, evidence of teaching scholarship, and writing samples. When targeting a department, applicants should know their audience and craft their application materials accordingly. If an interview is offered, the candidate can expect various processes to ensue, depending on the type of school, and some interview scenarios are presented. Tips on what to ask during interviews and how to follow up after the visit are offered. (RJM)

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THE PROCESS OF FINDING YOUR FIRST ACADEMIC POSITION

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Finding Your First Academic Position

Michelle R. Nelson

Introduction

> *You've survived years of toil, near-poverty subsistence, and the isolated existence of dissertating, and now you've reached the watershed. It's time to embark on your career as a full-fledged academic and you're scared to death. It has been years since you've worn a suit, let alone been on a job interview, and now your performance the next few months will decide your fate.*

Do not worry, as a graduate student, you are not alone, which is both comforting and alarming. But, by following the simple guidelines for what to do "before, during, and after" the interview in this paper and by talking with colleagues and peers within your own discipline, you will succeed at the job search. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld compares a first date to a job interview -- both experiences are filled with pressure and tension. You want to be on your best behavior and you're sort of nervous, but you should also maintain the same somewhat hopeful, somewhat laid-back outlook going into the occasion. It may indeed be your ideal mate or your ideal position, or it might not. Either way, you will get to meet interesting people, get a free meal, and perhaps a good story to tell. In essence, both occasions involve two parties assessing the "fit" or personality of the other.

In social psychology, research has shown that observers often make personality inferences about a target person based upon what they own, what they wear, what they do, or what they say. Therefore, in an interview situation, job candidates are likely to receive questions designed to access these criteria and to help search committees evaluate the match between the candidate and the department, university, city, or climate. The following is a list of actual questions received during campus visits by the author of this article: 1. Do you own any pets? 2. How was your trip? How

was your flight? 3. Would you like another glass of wine? 4. What makes you tick? 5. Have you read X article? How do you think X would fit in your research? 6. What was the last movie you saw? 7. Why did you go into Academia? 8. What is your teaching philosophy? How do you put that into practice? 9. How are you enjoying the interview process? 10. Why would you want to live in X? (e.g., Winnipeg). Each of these questions was designed to know the candidate or to test their knowledge. The best responses to these questions are honest ones that match the interviewer's expectations. Although it is not possible for a job candidate to anticipate the questions or the expected answers, it is wise to be prepared. This paper will lead candidates through the job search process, from advice about preparing application materials and finding available positions to knowledge about what to expect during the interview, and what to do when the job offer arrives.

The Job Application Process

Know Yourself

Preparation for the job market should begin with a soul-searching process. Candidates need to know themselves–their strengths, weaknesses, and goals within academia and within the bigger picture of life while applying for jobs and especially while answering questions at the interview. Now is the time to think about where you (and your family) would be most satisfied living. What kind of department or university are you looking for? Which is more important to you -- teaching or research? Make a list of your priorities and keep referring to that list throughout the year.

Even before a candidate is "on the market," s/he should start thinking about what experiences they might be lacking (e.g., teaching experience or a conference publication) and seek them out. An important document for objectively evaluating experience is the *curriculum vita* (CV). Unlike the real-world resume, the length of a CV is often correlated to success in the job market. The

following sections are recommended for an academic CV, but candidates are cautioned to speak with advisors and peers within their own discipline for further guidance and for format considerations.

How to Prepare Your CV

Instead of staring at a blank computer screen, it is easier to model one's own document after an existing one. Asking an advisor or peer for an example is a good way to get started, then simply fill in your information. The first section serves as an introduction and a way to locate the candidate -- it should contain the full name and e-mail address, home address and phone number, as well office information (i.e., address, phone and fax numbers). For some positions, candidates might also be required to list their birthdate, social security number, or citizenship status. The next section usually is entitled Education and begins with information about the current institution. Along with the full name and location of the institution should be the department name, the candidate's major and minor areas of study, dissertation title, expected graduation date, dates of attendance, and grade point average. Any prior institutions and degrees received should be listed next. Again, complete information including a master's thesis title is recommended.

An additional section called Academic Experience can highlight the work performed by the candidate while attending each institution. This experience highlights teaching and research assistantships and should include the institution, the term(s) worked, the supervisor's name, and a description of the responsibilities.

In academia one often hears the phrase "publish or perish." Fortunately, the pressure to perform isn't quite as high as a doctoral student, although having a publication in a refereed journal can certainly enhance one's position on the job market. As such, a Publications section should also be included in one's CV. These can include conference proceedings, co-authored chapters, and

journal articles. Complete information for all the publications should be listed, as well as an indication of which ones were peer-reviewed.

Publications at an early stage of one's career show the candidate understands what it takes to be an academic and serve as reference points for future work. Similarly, a section entitled "Manuscripts in Progress" offers more information to the search committee of a candidate's continuing work ethic and areas of interest, and demonstrates promise for future publications. These manuscripts can describe work-in-progress and should include any co-authors and their affiliations.

Conference Presentations also show evidence of scholarship and ability to communicate effectively. This information warrants a separate section and should include the title of the presentation and names of co-authors, the title of the conference and/or association, and the dates of the conference.

Research Interests can be included in a separate heading or in an accompanying cover letter. If listed in the CV, there should be two or three distinct areas, written in one to two sentence summaries, describing the area and your contribution to each.

In some fields (e.g., marketing, education, or communications), Professional Experience is also important for describing a candidate's qualifications. If so, candidates should include relevant employment experiences and provide detailed information about the organization/company, the job title, the location, the dates worked, a description of the duties performed, and their supervisor's name.

A third component of academic evaluation includes Service work. This might include public lectures (e.g., class talks, guest lectures, or community speeches) or other experiences such as academic advising, tutoring, lab monitoring, and any volunteer or committee work.

In addition, any Professional Affiliations and Trade organizations can be listed under a separate heading, and another one entitled Honors and Awards or Achievements might include the candidate's involvement in academic fraternities and any grants, scholarships, or teaching accolades received.

To highlight the teaching component of one's experience, a separate section called Teaching Interests might list any of the courses typically taught within a department in which the candidate is applying that s/he feels comfortable teaching.

Although some applications require official transcripts to be sent along with a CV, it is often a good idea to include a section listing Coursework Taken (i.e., List of Courses Taken During Graduate Career). This is especially helpful for search committees who are evaluating a candidate from an interdisciplinary field or another field from the one that is hiring.

Finally, the candidate should list three to five References, including the advisor as well as any teaching or professional references. Full names, titles, affiliation and contact information should be provided.

After completing a draft of the CV, an advisor or department head should evaluate and edit it. Any typographical or grammatical error will harm a candidate's chances and by obtaining opinions from those who hold hiring power, a candidate can get an idea of how their qualifications compare to others.

Where the Jobs Are

Once the dissertation is well underway (about a year before estimated completion date) graduate students should begin looking for job postings in their areas. These postings come in many forms, primarily from professional or academic associations (such as the American Psychological

Association) by way of printed newsletter, conference interviews and recruiting, electronic bulletin boards or web postings, and direct mail letters. In addition, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* offers a weekly newspaper (on-line version available as well) that provides available academic positions for all disciplines both within the U.S. and internationally. In many cases, it's not what you know but who you know, so it is wise for candidates to inform colleagues and friends that they are on the market. Perhaps a friend-of-a-friend has an uncle who is hiring for the position you are seeking. In some cases, students' advisors will offer to send out letters to their contacts or will make phone calls to expedite the job search process. In other cases, unsolicited applications are sent to schools in which the candidate has an interest. It is advisable to discuss the worthiness of this type of strategy with colleagues within your discipline before mailing out numerous applications.

Gather Your Materials

In addition to a CV, many applications require additional information from job candidates. This information often includes *official* transcripts from all institutions (past and present) where a candidate has attended. These can take some time and money to locate, so candidates are advised to order a fair quantity ahead of time. Three to four letters of recommendation are often requested -- these letters sometimes will be sent by the candidate with the other materials and sometimes will be sent separately by the person who is writing the letter. Recommendation letters should come from a student's advisor and other high-powered individuals who know the candidate well. In addition, some applications require evidence of teaching scholarship, such as copies of course syllabi, teaching evaluations, sample assignments, and a statement of teaching philosophy. For research institutions, it is common practice to request a dissertation abstract or the first chapter, as well any previously published articles. It is also prudent to prepare a dissertation timeline, which lists all activities for

the dissertation (including pilot tests, data collection, etc.) and an estimated completion date. This will demonstrate a candidate's organization skills and offer assurance that the candidate will, indeed, finish the dissertation in a timely manner. Even if job applications do not require any of the above materials, it is a good idea to have them ready for the job interviews. That way, when the search committee asks about such information, the candidate is prepared and has supporting documentation.

Know Your Audience

Step two of the academic job search involves a web-surfing process -- just as important as knowing oneself is knowing one's audience. Before applying for a job, the candidate should examine the university and the department on the world wide web or in other resources. In an application letter, reference should be made to some current event in the department (e.g., new computer lab), or to some surprising or impressive information that was found. Such items will demonstrate to the search committee that the candidate is motivated and sincerely interested in the position. In addition, candidates should become knowledgeable about the faculty members and administration (their research areas, recently published articles, where they received their doctoral degrees, etc.). This type of information (for example, a shared research interest or a shared mentor) may provide the necessary connection between the interviewee and search committee screeners and will set apart one candidate from the others.

Send Off Your Materials

Disciplines vary in the timing of their search and screen, interviewing, and hiring processes, but many job application deadlines occur in the Fall, with interviews in early Spring and hiring decisions in late Spring. Deadlines for materials in September, October, and November are very

common. It is important to meet those posted deadlines. Although search committees may not review materials until well after the deadline, they do not have to legally accept any materials received after the deadline either. Once the materials have been sent off, the waiting process begins. From November 30 through January 15, it is uncommon for interviews to be scheduled, so candidates should not become discouraged.

The Interview Process

What to Expect

Academic interviews can vary in format and length -- from phone interviews (used often for international positions) and one-day visits to three or four-day on campus interviews. Once an interview has been scheduled, the candidate should request a social and interview itinerary to gain knowledge of the interview context and of the department. In smaller schools or in rural settings, candidates will likely spend at least two or three days in a job interview, and in some cases, it is the candidate who is being "wined and dined" for the position. Social activities can include events or meetings with students, faculty, or administration and vary from dinners and basketball games to real estate tours and jazz concerts. By knowing which events are scheduled and with whom, the candidate can discern wardrobe and monetary needs.

Who organizes the travel schedule and who pays for it often vary from school to school. In some cases, the administrative help will ask about a candidate's availability and will book the flight and hotel arrangements through a university vendor. In other cases, it is the candidate's responsibility to schedule and pay for travel arrangements upfront and will be reimbursed at a later date.

Interviews will also differ in the extent of their requirements. By requesting an itinerary, candidates can assess the priorities of the search committee. For example, in smaller schools a teaching seminar may be required of the candidate. In this case, the candidate can assume that teaching is an important priority for the school and for the tenure package. If this is required, candidates should ask about the course, the topics, the students, the facility for teaching, the length of the class, the textbooks utilized, etc. and should prepare a lecture that is representative of their teaching style. In research-oriented schools, a "job talk" or research colloquium is often required. This talk is usually based on dissertation research and varies from 20 minutes to two hours. In planning a job talk, it is important for candidates to concentrate on "telling a story" with their research and not to get concerned about presenting all the "data." In addition, candidates should keep in mind the following basic goals for the presentation. You want to show: 1. you're a competent person; 2. you know your theory; 3. you have strong methods; 4. your dissertation is on track; 5. your data look promising; and 6. you offer important contributions to the field and areas for future research. Again, candidates should request logistical information about the time length, the intended audience, the facility and equipment, etc. for the talk.

When presenting their research, candidates should always be gracious towards the audience, even if the faculty members offer unrelated advice or irrelevant criticism. Sometimes group dynamics within the audience cannot be anticipated and are unrelated to the candidate. In addition to the formal research talk, candidates will often be asked about their research by different audiences (e.g., students, faculty, administration) in varying contexts. It is wise to starting preparing different versions of your research story, from a two-sentence summary (e.g., "I am studying how one's

culture and values affect the way they process advertising messages) to a five-minute description of the theory, methods and initial findings.

Finally, most interviews require one-on-one interviews with faculty, administration, and students, as well as an interview with the entire search committee. Candidates should use the information they know about each of the faculty members to prepare separate questions for each person. Examples of questions targeted at each group will be provided next.

What to Ask

When interviewing with the search committee or with the head of the department, questions relating to teaching, research, and service are expected. The following questions related to teaching might be asked: What is the average class size? What kinds of students attend the University? What kinds of students are X (your discipline) majors? Where do the students go from here? (where do they get jobs? is there a placement service?) What classes would I be teaching? What is the teaching load? Who taught this class before? How is the academic calendar organized? 3 terms? fall/winter/spring? Then, the candidate is advised to create some questions specific to the position (e.g., I see that you have 2 majors within communication: corporate communication and technical and science communication, what % of students enroll in each? How does their concentration differ?).

More general questions that can be asked include the same types of questions that will be asked of the candidate. Questions such as "What do you think are your biggest strengths?" and "How do you promote research interests among the faculty?" will help the candidate assess the fit between the department and their own goals. Next, by asking, **"Why were you interested in me?"** or **"What does the department hope to gain with this**

hire?" the candidate can ascertain the needs of the department and can market him/herself accordingly. Other questions might address the role of faculty in developing the curriculum or additional courses of interest to the candidate. Questions applicable to service include the extent of requirements (i.e., at the department, school, or campus-wide levels) and what counts as "service" in tenure evaluations.

When meeting with the department head, the dean of the school, or the provost, candidates will want to discuss resource issues, such as the availability of summer teaching or summer research stipends, the procedure for professional development (e.g., conference travel), and the computer facilities and library services. In addition, the long-term strategy of the department and/or school might be discussed or the role of the university within the community.

Some search committees and most interviews include students -- from undergrads to doctoral students. These meetings are often more informal and are a good chance for the candidate to find out the "real" information about a department. Questions such as "what do you like or dislike about the department? the courses? the faculty?" and "what suggestions do you have?" often are good openers and the conversation usually flows freely from there.

After the Interview

After the interview, candidates should send thank you letters to each of the people with whom they interviewed. These letters can be hand-written or communicated through electronic means or may be more formalized letters on letterhead. The format and tone of the letter will depend on the perceived rapport and the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer. In the letter, reference should be made to a common point -- something discussed during the interview or a shared research interest or experience learned while the candidate was on campus. Any materials

requested from interviewers (such as articles, references, etc.) should also be sent. Then, the waiting game begins. Occasionally, candidates will receive immediate feedback while at the interview or in the days immediately following the trip. More common is the two to six month waiting period.

When a candidate receives word via a phone call, it is normally good news, but it is important for candidates to receive confirmation of any job offer in writing as well. While discussing the job position, it is advisable for the candidate to negotiate salary and other resources and requirements, such as moving expenses, computers, and lab materials. By having an idea of the standard starting salaries offered in your field and the cost of living expenses within the city, you will have more bargaining power. Once the offer letter and contract are signed, the candidate should celebrate accordingly and then get back to work on the dissertation.